

Lone Wolf Club Newsletters

Newsletter #18

Joe Dever is the creator of the bestselling Lone Wolf adventure books and novels. He is the creator and editor of the original Lone Wolf Club Newsletters that were published between 1985–96.

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Dominic Roberts – providing scans for missing / damaged pages.

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NEWSLETTER No. 18

Following closely on the heels of the hugely successful "The Plague Lords of Ruel" comes the second Grand Master adventure:

THE CAPTIVES OF KAAG

It is published on Feb. 14th 1991. See page 13 of this extended newsletter for a special pre-order form which will enable you to reserve your signed copy of this exciting gamebook.

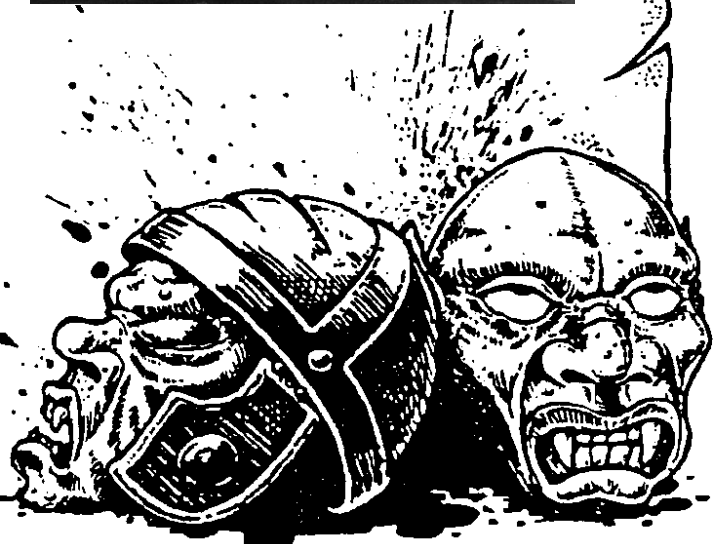
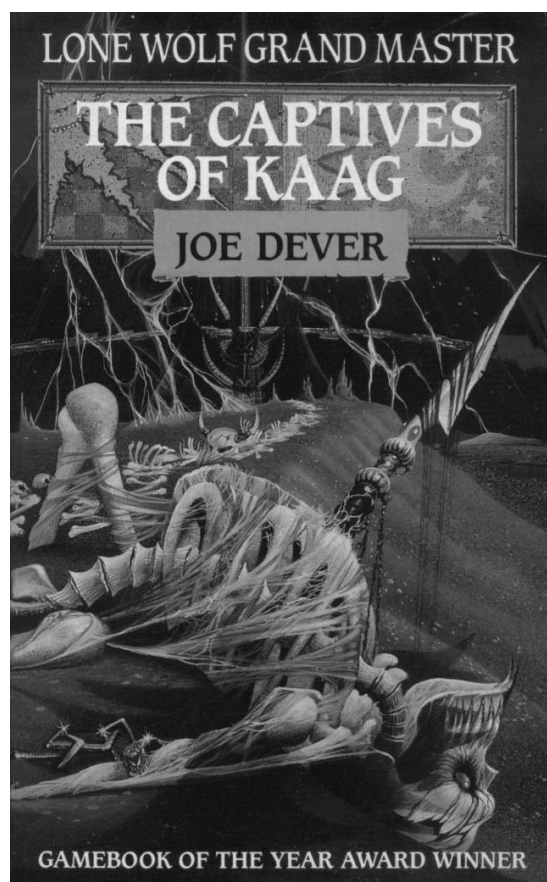
Also featured in this issue:

THE LEAN COW—a short story by Joe Dever, set in the world of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Part 2 of the ADVENTURES OF SABRE FOX, FIREFLY, BLACK HAWK & WILD WEASEL by Michael Hole

Plus

KAI KONNECTION,
NEWS FROM THE MONASTERY,
& CLUB COMPETITION



THE ADVENTURES OF SABRE FOX, FIREFLY, BLACK HAWK & WILD WEASEL

by Kai Grand Master Michael Hole

PART TWO: Preparations

Early morning . . .

The Kai monastery melded with the dark landscape. Early morning. The air was still and scented by the dewy grass. Early morning. A solitary candlelight ignited into being.

The four boys looked at each other in silence. Their time had come and there was no turning back now.

"Sssshhhhh!" hissed Sabre Fox. "Remember, there are people next door. No noise!"

"Come on, let's go," whispered Black Hawk. "Lone Wolf's waiting."

The boys quietly shuffled to the corner of the room and gathered up their belongings which they had neatly prepared the morning before. Then they walked to the door and stepped into the darkness beyond . . .

The candle struggled to illuminate the vast corridor. It did not succeed particularly well, as Black Hawk soon found out.

"Aggh!" He had walked face-first into a pillar. The others stood there, transfixed, trying not to breathe in case they too were heard. Then came that unearthly, deathly silence which so shook their pounding hearts. Nothing. No noise at all. Sabre Fox could hold his breathe no longer. He felt as if he had been holding his breath for almost a year. He exhaled noisily and his companions groaned their disappointment. Black Hawk and Sabre Fox fumbled their apologies and the group set off once more towards the Tower of the Sun.

Two hundred yards and eight hundred and thirty steps later they reached the top of the great tower. The darkness which greeted them was total. Doubt and fear began to take its toll.

"Where is Lone Wolf? He said he'd meet us here."

"Has he begun his quest already?"

"Is our mission over?"

Hundreds of nagging questions filled their minds. Then, quite suddenly, a strong light flooded the landing and their master was there, standing before them at the doorway to his chamber.

"Goodness. How long have you been there? Come in, and forgive me. I was sleeping."

The four young warriors eagerly obeyed their master's command. All were slightly taken aback when they noticed that Lone Wolf was bedecked in battle gear finely crafted from Gourgaz hide.

"Are you going somewhere, my Lord?" asked Wild Weasel, inquisitively.

"Now listen with care," replied Lone Wolf, "for I must inform you of a slight change to our plans. I'll be accompanying you as far as Ragadorn."

The four boys smiled simultaneously, honoured by the thought of riding alongside their Grand Master.

"It is three hours past midnight. I take it you have all prepared your equipment, but do so again once more before we leave for the stables."

The four of them did as they were told, then followed their master as he led them quickly to the stables by corridors and passages they never knew existed. Five fine steeds awaited them and, after saddling and mounting them, the party of Kai lordlings spurred them across the monastery courtyard and out through the south gate.

On through the early morning they rode in silence, stopping neither to eat nor rest. Their concern was to reach Holmgard by noon of the following day. Excitement carried the four youngsters through a sleepless night and, when they arrived at the capital late the following morning, the city guards, upon hearing from whence they had come, were astonished by their noticeable lack of fatigue.

"Open the gates!" yelled a burly guardsman. At once the command was obeyed and the heavy portals of Holmgard yielded to receive the honourable party of Kai Lords. It was two hours before noon, two hours before the four Kai lordlings were to meet their criminal charges.

As the Kai Lords were riding along the city streets, Firefly couldn't get over the fact that Holmgard was so busy. There were people everywhere. Heated arguments, strange sights, strange smells, magicians, bards, minstrels, knights of the realm, guildsmen, vagabonds, beggars. It was as if this never-ending stream of humanity was a play that had been put on especially for them. Lone Wolf led his young protégés through a maze of alleys where a few impressed residents looked up at them admiringly. Guided by their master's infallible sense of direction, they were soon at the entrance to a deserted courtyard. Only the sound of their horses' hooves clattering across the cobblestones broke the silence.

"Dismount!" commanded Lone Wolf, in a soldierly voice. In one swift and fluid movement, the Grand Master took hold of his pack and slid from his horse's back. Then he tethered the reins to a post and watched as the others, less adeptly, followed his lead. Then he led them to the doors of the largest building where he hammered upon it five times with his clenched fist. A pause, then the door creaked open and the four of them gasped with surprise when they saw who it was who now stood before them: Banedon, former Guildmaster of the Brotherhood of the Crystal Star.

"Welcome, Lone Wolf," he said, greeting his old friend with a warm handshake. "Come in, I've been expecting you."

Banedon smiled at the four boys and ushered them into the building with unexpected haste. They were escorted down a long corridor and not once did Banedon stop talking to Lone Wolf. The Grand Master's face was sombre and although they could not make out Banedon's words, it was obvious to them that his news was not wholly good. Soon they reached a main hall and, as they entered, they were shocked to discover a large assembly of Sommlending officials awaiting them, which included King Ulnar himself. Sabre Fox, especially, felt very embarrassed when he strode into the hall for he was the first of the four boys and he felt as if all eyes were upon him . . . which they were. Banedon made the formal introductions, after which Lord Rimoah, speaker for the High Council of Elzian, began to speak about the mission to Elzian. He concluded the briefing by stating the route which the Kai Lords would take. Lone Wolf was to accompany the four younger Kai to Ragadorn in a specially-prepared transporter. Six horses would draw it and inside there was room enough for eight persons: the four criminals (Iylpos, Adwar, Jarek, and Dolby) and the four Kai. The first part of the journey would, of course, begin at Holmgard and end at Ragadorn, and would be made along the Wildlands' coastal highway. At Ragadorn the coach would be abandoned and a new form of transport used instead. Lone

Wolf would have to leave the party here in order to pursue his own, secret mission, and a river boat would be used to transport the prisoners up the Dorn as far as V'ka. From V'ka they are to travel to Casiorn where they are to make contact with a loyal Sommlending agent called Lorin Dolby (who, by the way, is absolutely no relation to Sebb Dolby, one of the criminals). Lorin will guide them to the River Churdas where they will obtain a boat and travel downstream for one hundred miles. At this stage they'll leave the river and ride due east to Tahou. At Tahou, the Kai are to replenish their provisions and make a rendezvous with their next, and most exciting, means of transport—Banedon's *Skyrider*. The flying ship will carry them swiftly via Nikesa to Elzian, where the prisoners are to be handed over to the Magi Regnanti—thus completing the mission. The Kai will be guests of the Elder Magi for a week before returning to their homeland no later than three moons from now.

The plan having been discussed at some length, the attention of the assembly finally turns to the boys themselves.

Now, my young lords,' said Rimoah, staring them in the eye, Do you have any questions to ask of us?

A short silence followed as the four boys shifted nervously.

"Are we in danger of attack?" asked Sabre Fox. "I mean, when our Grand Master leaves us at Ragadorn, will we be in danger of an ambush?" The four listened intently for an answer to the question that had been foremost in all their minds. Rimoah didn't reply. In fact, he looked uncomfortable. The silence was broken by Lone Wolf. He stepped forward and, with confidence, said:

"Have faith in yourselves, my lords! You are Kai warriors. You will surely prevail against any dangers that may confront you during your noble mission. Look to your faith in Kai himself for he will fortify you in times of trial."

The four young lords bowed their heads in acknowledgment of their master's answer. His words filled them with a renewed sense of pride but they did not remove the fear that was gnawing relentlessly at their insides. They had feared that the mission was going to be dangerous; now they all knew for sure.

Next issue: The Departure



LONEWOLF



BANEDON

The Kai Konnection



The Kai Konnection is a regular feature of the Lone Wolf Club Newsletter for those of you who would like to make new friends by post.

Name: BERNI F JEFFREY
Age: 13
Address: England
Hobbies: RPGs (AFF, AD&D, RQ), gamebooks, comic-books (Marvel & DC), judo basketball.
Would like a male / female pen-pal, English-speaking, preferably with similar interests.

Name: RICHARD WARREN
Age: 15
Address: England
Hobbies: Lone Wolf, reading, collecting books, wildlife, most sports.
Would like a pen-pal, male / female, aged 14-16, UK resident, similar interests.

Name: SCOTT SMITH
Age: 15
Address: USA
Hobbies: Lone Wolf, Grey Star, Freeway Warrior, computer adventure games.
Would like a pen-pal, male or female with similar interests.

Name: MALCOLM FINLAYSON
Age: 11
Address: England
Hobbies: Lone Wolf, computer games (Spec 128), pop music, Legends of Lone Wolf.
Would like a pen-pal, boy or girl, any age, any nationality, preferably a computer owner.

Name: STEPHEN STRELLET
Age: 16
Address: England
Hobbies: Most RPGs, Lone Wolf & solo gamebooks, US football, martial arts.
Would like an American pen-pal, preferably female, similar age and interests.

Name: TRACY PATTON
Age: 20
Address: USA
Hobbies: Lone Wolf (of course), fantasy & sci-fi books, drawing, D&D.
Would like a pen-pal, boy or girl, any age, any nationality, preferably similar interests.

Name: MICHAEL HOLE
Age: 17
Address: Wales
Hobbies: Lone Wolf, FF, myths of old UK, videos, astronomy, painting miniatures, music (Ultravox, OMD).
Would like a pen-pal aged 16-20, preferably with similar interests (he knows nothing about computers!)

Name: ERICA CARVER
Age: 13
Address: England
Hobbies: RPGs, Lone Wolf, FF, sport, sci-fi, soul music.
Would like a pen-pal, male or female, aged 12-15, any nationality, similar interests.

Name: IAN FISH
Age: 12
Address: England
Hobbies: Adventure books, RPGs, painting miniatures, SEGA, watching TV.
Would like a pen-pal, any nationality, male or female, similar age & interests.



Kai Konnection Form:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

..... AGE:

YOUR HOBBIES / INTERESTS

.....

TYPE OF PEN-PAL YOU WOULD LIKE

.....

.....

Fill in this form in BLOCK CAPITALS please, and send it to:
LONE WOLF CLUB (KK), 39 Corfe Way, Broadstone, Dorset, BH18 9ND

YES! I would like to become a LONE WOLF pen-pal. Please feature me in the next newsletter (space permitting).

THE LEAN COW

Joe Dever

The Lone Wolf Club is proud to present this previously unpublished short story by Joe Dever. It is set in England in the time of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and was inspired by a verse which appears in the English literary medieval classic "Canterbury Tales" by Geoffrey Chaucer. It tells the story of an unusual quest, reluctantly undertaken by Sir Mordred of Orkney, the notorious 'black sheep' of King Arthur's court.

O noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence
Let noon humilitie your tongues naye:
Ne at no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of you a story of such mervayle
As of Griseldes, pacient and kynde,
Lest Chichevache you swolwe in hir entraile.

"Tell us, Sir Mordred, how are things in Orkney? Do they still burn men in wicker there?"

Lancelot was spoiling for a fight. Like many of the outwardly virtuous, he became a particularly nasty drunk once wine had loosened the restraints placed by his sober self on half his nature. And he was beginning to fester from too many long weeks at Caerleon mooning after the Queen. He'd never liked me so I was a natural target once he decided to let off some steam. He'd probably be quite contrite about it in the morning and would spend long hours warming the chapel flagstones with his knees.

I sipped my ale and tried to ignore him, but he was never one to be content to leave well enough alone. "I was speaking to you, Sir Pict. Can you no understand a civilized tongue?"

My small size and dark complexion have always made 'Pict' a natural insult, but that didn't mean that I'd gotten used to it. For once in my life, I actually felt mad enough to fight. That should tell you how drunk I was. Normally, I have more sense than to antagonize the deadliest man in Britain.

"Yes," I replied, "and I also understand your croaking when I hear it, Sir Frog."

I was lucky. In Caerleon it was considered gauche to wear steel at the table. As Lancelot rose from his chair, his right hand groped for the hilt of his sword and he seemed befuddled not to find it at his side, so I took the initiative by kicking him soundly between the legs. As he doubled over, I brought my knee up in his face and broke my tankard on the back of his head. These chivalrous twits are really quite lost without their swords and lances, for they have no concept of common brawling.

Arthur stormed up out of his chair. "Hold!" he shouted, "Mordred, what have you done?"

"Broken a perfectly good tankard, Your Highness."

"Don't mock me, boy. How is Lancelot?" This last was directed at my half brother. "Stunned, but living," said Gawain, from the floor where he was examining the fallen Frenchman. Bad luck there; I'd be safer if I'd killed him.

"Mordred, you've broken the laws of hospitality," snapped the King. "Do you forget where you are?"

"I am sorry, my liege, but the lout insulted my heritage."

"Then you should have demanded satisfaction of him."

I shrugged. "I took my satisfaction in what seemed to be the most expedient manner."

Arthur shook his head and made a great show of dramatizing his sorely tried patience.

"Mordred, we are not in pagan Orkney. Here we settle our affairs with Christian honour."

"You mean Christian steel in the guts, father."

The last word was a mistake. The King rose, his craggy face as red as his hair.

"You misname me, nephew," he said, in a dangerous whisper. "Perhaps your ale-clouded eyes are seeing King Lot's visage in place of my own."

Even in private it was risky to broach the subject of my paternity and to do so in front of the entire court could be worth my life. Time to toady.

"Indeed, my liege," I said as I dropped to my knees, "this Cornish ale is far stronger than what I'm used to in Orkney and my wits are so befuddled that for a moment I thought myself back on that cold island. I can only beg forgiveness for having so dishonoured your royal table."

The rage died on his face. "Strong drink makes beasts of the best of men. If you dishonourably struck down my best knight, perhaps you had some cause for your anger. When Lancelot regains consciousness, it will do him good to realize that he is no nearer the angels than any other man." So that was it. He was not unhappy to see the vainglorious clot taken down a peg. Perhaps he suspected what lay between Lancelot and the Queen. My father was a darker, deeper man than the simple soldier he pretended to be.

"Know this, Mordred," he continued in the tone he reserved for sonorous declamations, "it is my wish that you be exiled from this court until such time as you have erased this stain on your honour."

"And how may I do that, My Lord?" I asked with as much shamed humility as I could manage without puking.

"By performing some notable deed of valour. The world is still a wicked place, for all my efforts. You'll find no dearth of opportunity."

So that was it. A quest. A tedious, difficult, and no doubt dangerous quest. And an unspecified and rather open-ended one at that.



But I had no real choice. If I remained in Caerleon, Lancelot's honour would undoubtedly demand that I met him on the tilting yard. He'd slain enough men that way with nothing more in mind than sport and good clean fun. I had no illusions about what he'd do to me unless I gave him time to cool down. Damn it, I'd been enjoying the easy court life. I mentally swore never to get drunk at Arthur's table again.

My latest squire (the last raving run away after I broke three of his ribs in a fit of temper), a greasy lout whose name I'd never bothered to learn, led the horses across the dung-strewn courtyard to the stable. Cursing the clinging mud, I trudged towards the door of the inn.

At least there was a roaring fire. I sat down on the hearth, removed my rain-soaked cloak, and spread it out to dry on the warm stones. When my squire returned from stabling the horses, I gave him my hauberk and helmet to clean and polish carefully with a small jar of mutton fat from my saddle roll. "Any rust and I'll kick your fat backside up between your shoulder blades," I growled. He scurried away to the stable, where he'd spend the night guarding the horses and baggage.

Letting my own backside absorb the heat from the crackling embers, I hugged my knees to my chest and surveyed the interior of the inn.

Nothing much, just a rushes-strewn flagstone floor, two long tables, a rough-hewn bar, and a ladder leading up through a trapdoor in the ceiling to the innkeeper's quarters. The innkeeper himself, a short square man with thinning red hair, dipped a tankard into one of the ale tons and handed it across the bar to a gawky youth with a surfeit of pimples, who was leaning on a broom and staring at me with wide-set, glassy eyes that made me think of an incredulous codfish.

"Don't just stand there, Toby. Take the gent his ale."

The boy took the tankard and advanced timidly. "Are you a knight?" he asked nervously.

"Aye. I'm a knight. And you're a twit. Now give me that ale before you spill it."

"You'll have to forgive him, Sir," said the innkeeper. "He's never seen your sort before. We don't get much quality trade here."

"I should think not, if all your lackeys are halfwits." (I get morose after a long day's ride.)

The boy handed me the tankard and darted back to his master's side. "Oh he's no halfwit, Sir. He's a good lad and a hard worker. I'll never regret taking him in like I did after I found him sleeping in the ditch outside one morning."

I sipped my ale. It wasn't bad. Not watered at all. "He's a runaway serf, then."

"No Sir, not at all. He used to belong to Mother Gloam, a witch living a few leagues down the road. He was her toad eater. Can't say I blame him for running away."

Nor could I. One of the numerous idiocies subscribed to by the common rabble is the belief that toads are virulently poisonous (any soldier campaigning in gameless country without sufficient supplies soon learns better. Nauseating, yes; deadly, no.)

Therefore, on Fair days the local witch will come to town with her toad eater: a lackey who, in full view of the gaping crowd, eats a live toad and immediately goes into rather hammy death throes. The witch then gives the boy some quack potion and he recovers and demonstrates his renewed health by turning a few cartwheels. The crowd is appropriately awed and starts lining up to purchase small jars of the miraculous philtre. Even witches with genuine power often fatten their purse this way. It's such an old trick that you'd think the yokels would've caught on years ago, but they never do.

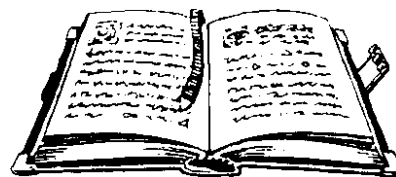
Eventually, the former toad eater was able to recover sufficiently from his awed paralysis to resume sweeping the floor. I sipped my ale and brooded. Two long months on the road, without a single opportunity for a 'notable deed of valour' rearing its ugly head. And the rain had been an incessant nuisance for over a week now. I enjoy getting wet about as much as a cat does (I'd only used the old Roman baths at Caerleon in order not to be thought an uncouth Scot) and I despise the rain with a passion. It's the ultimate expression of God's contempt; the creator urinating on his own handiwork.

Suddenly, the door was thrown open and a tall, stoop-shouldered man in his late middle age strode in, followed by two burly men-at-arms. The fine cut of his tunic indicated that he was a noble of some sort and I wondered what he was doing in a dump like this.

The innkeeper obviously wondered the same thing.

"Why, Sir Anwar," he sputtered, I'm honoured by your . . ."

Sir Anwar cut him off with a wave of his hand and strode towards me. I didn't stand—I'd be damned if I was going to bother with social niceties out here in the sticks. But I nodded to acknowledge his bow.



"Your man in the stables tells me you're from Caerleon."

"Aye, for what it's worth. I'm Sir Mordred of Orkney."

"It's worth quite a lot to me, if you're one of Arthur's knights. Your presence here saves me a long ride."

Well, perhaps my quest had found me.

"Is there something I can do for you, Sir Anwar?"

"Indeed, there is. It's my wife. Chichevache has her."

So that was it. "Count yourself lucky, Sir Anwar."

"Lucky? What do you mean?"

"Well, for one thing, you now know you've never been a cuckold. For another, you're now free to marry a younger woman."

Some people have no sense of humour. He glared at me and snapped—"My wife is a younger woman, damn your eyes! And I'd gladly be a cuckold several times over if I could have her back."

I'd heard the stories of Chichevache, of course. The creature was said to prowl the land in search of faithful wives, for they were its only food. Naturally, the monster was perpetually starving. Evidently there was more to the legend than just rumours spread by randy young rakes with a taste for other men's wives.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but I hardly see what I can do. If the monster has her then she's apt to be gnawed to the bones by now."

He shook his head. "No, the creature took her last night. It stormed into my hall and snatched up Wylamette before a single sword had cleared its scabbard. And it said . . ."

"Said?" I interrupted. "It's intelligent?"

"Of course, everyone knows that. As I was saying, it seized her and it said that if I wanted to see her returned safely to my hall, then I must pay a ransom."

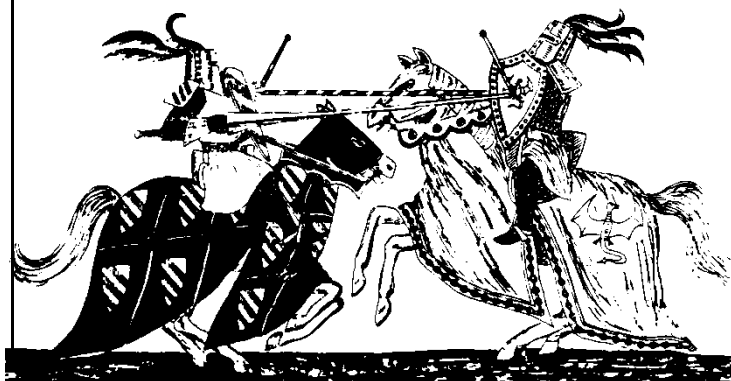
"What good is money to a monster?"

"It didn't ask for money. No, it wants its ransom to come from among the good wives of the manor. Six fat or twelve lean."

So, the creature was not only intelligent, it was downright enterprising. "Is your fief a large one?" I asked.

"Yes, but what does that . . ."

"Then surely you must have six or twelve 'good wives' among you serfs and villeins."



He seemed genuinely shocked. "That's monstrous."

I shrugged. "It's practical. They're just peasants."

"They're my peasants," he sputtered. "I can see that I've come to the wrong man. Good day, Sir Mordred." Shaking his head and muttering, he stalked out of the inn with his men-at-arms at his heels.

Well, stuff him, she was *his* wife and her rescue was his responsibility. That was the trouble with Arthur's Round Table. People no longer felt responsible for their own affairs. They expected the man on the white horse to solve all of their problems.

Of course, if I were to rescue the lady it would certainly be a 'notable deed of valour'. I considered the matter. Monster slaying was anything but the easy task the jongleurs made it seem. I'd learned that much by the way of several encounters with the huge worms that infest the Scottish lochs. And the giant humanoids are far more dangerous than any dragon or lake serpent, for they have intelligence as well as size and strength.

By all accounts, Chichevache was some sort of ogre. Despite its name, it was not in any sense a lean cow'. That was typical of the corrupted French used by the pretentious minstrels. In their ignorance they had substituted *vache* for the *Fache* in Chichefache and a name that had originally meant "Pinch Face" now suggested some kind of bovine monstrosity.

I had no desire to fight such a creature. But who said I had to? Rescuing the Lady Wylamette would in itself be a brave enough deed to get me back into Arthur's good graces (such as they were).

I rose, stretched, and took a seat at the nearest table. Toby refilled my tankard and brought me some bread and cheese while the innkeeper set a large kettle on the fire. After it had boiled for a while, he dipped out a bowl of maigre soup, such as is served on Abstinence days, and set it before me.

"What's this?" I growled.

"Soup, Sir."

"Stuff that, I want meat."

He coughed apologetically. "We have none, Sir."

I cursed him soundly and ordered him to have a bowl taken out to my squire in the stable.

There must be some way for me to be able to rescue Sir Anwar's wife without having to confront her abductor. But how? When Toby returned from the stable I was suddenly struck by an idea.

"Come here, boy."

He approached timidly. "Easy, lad," I said. "I won't hurt you. Now, your master tells me that you were once a toad eater. Is this true?"

"Aye, sir."

"And your mistress was one Mother Gloam, a local witch of some sort?"

He nodded, blanching at the sound of her name.

"Was she a real witch, Toby?"

"Aye, she was real enough."

"And could she do real magic? Not just fake mumbo jumbo?"

He nodded again. I'd hoped for as much. Standing up, I took him by the arm.

"Toby, I want you to take me to her dwelling."

Visibly, he trembled. "Please Sir, don't make me do that! I can't go back there: she'll kill me if I do!"

I shook my head. "No, boy, I'll protect you. And I'll bring you safely back here when I'm done."

He looked dubious, but he didn't resist as I donned my cloak and led him toward the door. The innkeeper started to protest, but a handful of coins tossed on the bar shut him up. I hustled Toby out into the courtyard.

The sun had set some time before and the full harvest moon was out. I led Toby to the stable door, where I whistled for my squire. "Horse and armour," I ordered, when finally he emerged. I donned my mail, mounted, and with my squire's help, got Toby up and riding pillion. He'd obviously never been on a horse before and my squire chuckled at his terror.

"No, you stay here," I told him when he asked if he should saddle up, too. I guided my mount out of the courtyard and onto the moonlit road.

Dawn was on the horizon when finally we came to the witch's cottage. It was no hovel, but a well built stone structure with a thatched roof. I dismounted, tethered my horse, and set Toby down beside me. He seemed unwilling to approach the shadowy dwelling and I had to take him by the arm and practically drag him to the door.



It opened in answer to my knocking. By the light of the candle in her hand I beheld Mother Gloam. Instead of the hag I expected, I saw a big, rawboned woman in vigorous middle age with a strong and not unpleasant face, long red hair, and the shoulders of a blacksmith.

She was surprisingly well dressed in a fine woollen shift and an even finer blue cloak.

"You're Mother Gloam, I take it," I said.

"Aye." Her gaze fell upon the boy at my side. "Ah, I see you've brought back my darling Tobias." Her smile had little warmth. "Dear boy, you should never have run off the way you did. It almost broke my poor old heart."

Toby simply stood there, paralyzed with fear. I shoved him ahead of me and stepped over the threshold. Mother Gloam shut the door and set the candle down on a low table. That piece of furniture, along with a stool and a comfortable looking chair, gave evidence of somebody's considerable skill at carpentry. A pallet bed was the only other furnishing. Coals glowed in a made hearth that was equipped with a kettle not unlike the one at the inn. The roots and herbs that hung in nets from the ceiling beams were no different from those to be found in any other country woman's kitchen. Nothing about the place particularly suggested a witch's abode.

"I've brought you back your toad eater, Mother Gloam," I said. "I trust you're grateful."

"Indeed I am, Good Sir. Indeed I am. I can't tell you how I've worried about the poor lad since he disappeared last Whitsuntide."

Toby whimpered and threw himself at my feet. "You promised not to give me back to her!" he wailed.

"I lied," I said as I kicked him away from my knees.

"And you'll be wanting something in return, Sir Mordred."

The fact that she knew my name abolished any doubts I might have had about her powers. "Yes," I said. "First, what can you tell me about Chichevache?"

She looked thoughtful. "Chichevache is it? A dreadful monster, to be sure. It eats nothing but the flesh of good and faithful wives. It used to go hungry most of the time. But what with Arthur's reforms, the beastie's had a field day these past few years." She began to laugh. "Not that our king need fear for his own wife's safety."

"Does the monster slay its victims right away?" I asked.

"No. It takes them back to its den and keeps them there alive until it's ready to eat. It likes to have proper cooked meals, you know. Puts in quite a larder."

That's what I wanted to know. The fact that my plan actually had a chance of succeeding frightened me a bit. "Can you cast illusion spells?" I asked.

"That I can. What sort of illusion did you have in mind?"

I took a deep breath and said, "I want you to give me the semblance of a good and virtuous wife."

She grinned. "So you're out to slay the monster and you want to use yourself as the bait. Arthur's knights are as brave as their reputations."

I felt certain that she was mocking me. "Can you make me a potential meal in the monster's eyes?" I snapped.

She was silent for a moment. "It will take more than just one layer of seeming, you know. Chichevache sees deeper than just the outward form. How else would it know its prey? A faithful wife looks no different from an unfaithful one."

"But can you do it?"

She nodded. "Aye, I can."

I held out my purse with all of its remaining coins. She took the money and put it on the table. "Are you ready then?" she asked.

I don't really remember the details of what happened after that. She ordered me to lie down on the floor and relax. A fog seemed to settle over my senses. I heard her chanting something, but the words were distant and indistinguishable.

More than anything else, I remember the look on Toby's face as he cowered in a corner like a whipped dog. I felt a brief spasm of guilt over the way I had betrayed him. It passed. There's little enough freedom in the world as it is and I'd never willingly become a slave to my own conscience.

It was near sunset of the next day that I set off on the road again. As I rode my horse under the darkening sky, I was conscious of a sort of double vision in all my senses. When I looked down at my waist and legs I saw both my own mail-clad torso and limbs sitting properly in the saddle and the gown-concealed legs of a woman hanging together over the same side.

In my head I felt equally divided. I knew that I was Mordred of Orkney and yet I had the memory and feelings of a person of another gender and station in life. As strongly as I recalled Caerleon and Lot's Orkney castle I also remembered the toil of a country farm and the strong embrace of a beloved husband. Strangely enough, the man in my pseudo-memories had Arthur's face. I wondered if that was a grotesque joke on Mother Gloam's part.

The wind blew hard across the dark and empty moor and I shivered in my nonexistent shawl. One by one, the stars gleamed like frozen jewels in the dark curtain of the sky and the moon began to mount the tumbled clouds. The fire in the west had gone out and the road was a pale ribbon in the gloom.

My gut was full of icicles. What if the creature slew me on the spot when it seized me? There were so many uncertainties in my plan. Was a triumphant return to the pious hypocrisy of Arthur's court really worth the danger?

Suddenly, my horse neighed in terror as a dark form reared up from a thicket beside the road. Before I knew what was happening, I was swept from the saddle and dashed head first to the ground.

When I awoke, I was lying on my back on cold hard clay. At first I thought that I was inside a natural cave of some sort, but then my eyes became accustomed to the gloom and I could make out the undressed logs that shored up the earthen walls and ceiling. I felt a sharp pang of claustrophobic terror that made me sit bolt upright.

Before me, the loamy floor of the burrow sloped downwards into the darkness. Flames guttered in a shallow pit near my feet, sending a plume of smoke upwards through a crude vent in the ceiling, and providing the faint illumination by which I was able to see. Small, round objects of some sort dangled from the timbers around the narrow chimney, the fumid odour reminded me of a smokehouse.

There was a draft at my back, a draft that hinted at the open air. I turned around. Sure enough, the passage climbed upwards and I caught a glimpse of the night sky. But all of my attention was on the creature that crouched there watching me, its great head scraping the ceiling a good eight feet above the clay it squatted on.

First-time fathers are often shocked by the ugliness of a newborn babe, especially a premature one. Imagine a face like that: red and wrinkled and toadishly pouting, a face both wizened and infantile. And if you can, now imagine that face as big as a barn door: a face like a pucker, pink, infant moon.

The rest of the creature was just as bad. I thought of the corpses and near-corpses of children that I'd seen during the last Scottish famine.

This being had the same shrunken, stunted limbs, the same

distended bubble of a stomach. Imagine a gigantic, starving, foetal child and you'll have a fairly accurate picture of what Chichevache looked like.

But when it spoke it was in a reedy, muddy voice thick with aged wisdom. "Good" it rasped. "Still alive. Can't fatten you up, dead."

"What are you going to do with me?" I babbled like a fool.

"Lucky. Times ain't what they were. Would have ate you right off. Once. Not now. Fat times now. Good times now." It laughed—a thick, slobbering sound like bubbles in a swamp. "Not starving now. Lots of virtue. Thanks to Arthur. Oh, yes. Fat times now." The mouth that had at first seemed rather small spread back and up behind its ears, bisecting the lower part of its face and revealing two rows of incredibly numerous teeth: razor-sharp teeth jarringly out of place in so infantile a face. All my life I'll remember that spreading, toothy smile, that mouth that looked as if it would stretch so wide that its two corners would meet on the other side of its owner's head.

The monster learned towards me and I scrambled back until I almost fell into the fire pit. It extended an arm and I saw that while its limbs were childishly small, its *hands* were long-fingered and almost as big as its head. It prodded my chest with a nail the size of a melon, then it reached up towards the roof of the tunnel.

For the first time I realised what hung there: the smoked, severed heads of over a dozen women, dangling by their long tresses. Seizing the nearest head, the monster tore it free, leaving the colourless hair and shrivelled scalp still tied to the beam. The exposed top of the skull gleamed yellowy as Chichevache bit down on it. I closed my eyes, but I could not shut out the dry crunching and then the hollow sucking sounds.

Was that the fate of Sir Anwar's wife? I prayed that hers was not one of the heads that hung there from the sooty beams, for if it was then all my efforts were for nothing.

I soon had my answer. Chichevache suddenly reached down and seized me. Lifting me easily into the air, it said: "Go, get you food. Put meat on your bones." Then it rose and carried me down the tunnel past the fire pit.

The walls and ceiling narrowed and became those of a natural cave, the far end of which was blocked by a large stone. On its knees now, the monster easily rolled that half ton or so of rock and thrust me into the dark recess beyond. 'Go get you food,' it repeated, as it replaced the boulder, leaving me alone in the imprisoning darkness.

No, not alone. I heard breathing. "Lady Wylamette?" I said softly.

'Who are you?' came the reply. The voice, at least, was soft and attractive.



I said the three words (grunts really) that Mother Gloam had taught me and was pleased to feel the female illusion fall away from me like a discarded cloak. "Lady Wylamette?" I repeated, in a now masculine voice.

"Who's there?"

"Sir Mordred of Orkney."

"You're a man!"

"Well, I've always thought so."

My groping encountered the hem of a silken dress and suddenly she was sobbing in my arms. She felt small, warm, and pleasantly full-bodied.

"What does Chichevache want with the likes of you?" she said.

"A spell was cast on me that gave me the semblance of a woman. A virtuous, married woman. It thinks me edible."

"What are you going to do now?" I thought for a moment. A bit of subtle misdirection was required here.

"When the monster returns and removes the stone, I'll slay it. When it thought me a woman, it could not see or feel the amour and sword I wear. I would have battled it then, aided by the illusion, but I wanted to find out where you were being held."

"Thank God," she said. "Oh, thank God." She relaxed and lay quietly at my side with her head on my chest. My hauberk couldn't have made for a very pleasant pillow, but in her state any comfort was a help.

"My husband!" she said suddenly. "What's become of my husband?"

"Sick with worry, My Lady. He offered me half his estate if I could but rescue you, but I said that the deed would be its own reward."

Her small hand enclosed mine. "There must be something that we can do for you..."

"No," I said. "Not once you're free. But for now..." I let the sentence dangle.

"Yes, Sir Mordred, what is it?"

I paused for sufficient effect. "Nothing, My Lady, the thought was unworthy of me."

"It's all right. Sir Mordred, tell me what it is you want."

"Well," I said, trying to sound halting and innocent, "I've not been a knight very long. I have not been a man very long. When the monster returns, it may slay me."

"No, don't say that!" She sounded frightened again.

"One must face the possibility. My Lady, I do not fear death. Yet, I could face it more easily... and perhaps fight more courageously... if..."

"If what, Sir Mordred?"

"If I knew that I was a man!" I blurted.

"But you *are* a man," she replied.

"I'm of age. But I've... I've never..."

"Oh." She was holding my hand tightly now.

"Forgive me, My Lady. As I said, the thought was unworthy."

And then her mouth met mine and I actually forgot all about Chichevache, forgot about where we were, forgot about everything but the task of getting out of my hauberk, gambeson, and breeches in that cramped darkness.

An hour later, as I buckled my mail back on, the stone plug was rolled away from the recess and I saw Chichevache standing silhouetted against the dim light. The creature held an entire roasted pig in one of its huge hands.

When it saw me, its face looked slackly confused. I drew my sword and it retreated in obvious amazement. Not wanting to give it the chance to trap me by moving the boulder back into place, I followed it out into the middle of its den.

Now anger replaced surprise on its features.

"You man," it snarled. "*You man!*"

"Yes," I said, "I'm a man, and you can't eat men can you?"

No. No good. Poison. Make sick."

I pointed back at Wylamette. "Look at her," I said. "Smell her, do whatever it is you do to recognize your food. She's no good to you now."

The monster looked over my shoulder. Its face seemed even more pouting than before. "Ruined!" it shrieked. "You ruined!"

It started to advance, its great hands raised menacingly.

I brandished my sword. "Don't try it." I snapped, trying not to sound as terrified as I felt. "All we want to do is leave. I don't want a fight. Now, get out of the way."

The monster seemed to consider the situation.

"Damn it," I practically screamed, "killing us will do you no good! You can't eat us. Not now. Maybe you can kill me, but if you try I'll hurt you first. I'll hurt you bad. Do you want that?"

"No. No want hurt."

"*Then get out of the way!*"

Slowly and sulkily, it moved aside. I took Wylamette by the hand and led her past, to the other side of the fire pit. Never taking my eyes off the monster, I pushed her ahead of me and then backed out of the tunnel into the open air.

We were on a hillside. "Run!" I said. "It may change its mind."

We ran until we were near to dropping, down slopes, up slopes, across flat stretches of thick heather that tangled our feet and tripped us. Finally, we collapsed together on the sward. For a long time we could do nothing but gasp in the early morning air.

"The sun's coming up," I finally said. "I think we're safe now."

"You didn't kill the monster," she said. There was no tone of accusation; it was just a statement of fact.

"Are you disappointed?"

"I'm alive. That's enough." I looked at her appraisingly for the first time. Despite the torn and muddy gown and the dishevelled hair so thick with dirt that I couldn't tell its colour, she was quite attractive. "I've a horse at the inn in town," I said. "Your husband is probably still riding for Caerleon. With luck we'll be able to meet him on the road when he returns with Lancelot."

"Lancelot?"

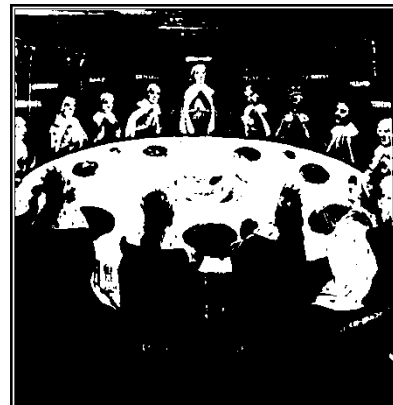
"Surely you've heard of him. He's one of Arthur's better knights. His methods are more orthodox than mine."

She took my hand again. You needn't worry that I'll tell my husband of your 'unorthodox' methods. In your own way, you did rescue me. For that, I'm grateful."

And she was. She really was. She lay back on the grass, smiling up at me, smiling a very peculiar, very grateful smile. How could I resist such a request?



A close brush with mortality is a fine remedy for any delusions of immortality that a person may harbour. My quest was more successful than I had hoped. Further, Lancelot will be only too happy to 'finish' the job by searching out and slaying Chichevache. He's good at that sort of thing. And in that way he can get his honour back without having to cleave my skull. Oh, he won't see it that way at first, but I feel confident that I can change his mind. Each sort of virtue has its own reward.



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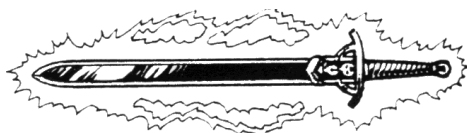
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News from the Monastery

We are delighted to be able to celebrate the successful publication of the first Grand Master gamebook—*The Plague Lords of Ruel*. So successful in fact that the first printing sold out prior to publication and Red Fox were obliged to reprint the book not once, but **twice** in order to satisfy the heavy demand. Needless to say, we are very grateful to loyal Lone Wolf fans who, by their enthusiastic support, made this possible.

1991 looks like being Joe Dever's busiest and most-productive year so far. He has recently completed work on the third Grand Master adventure (Lone Wolf 15) which is entitled **'The Darke Crusade'** (UK publication date, 8th August 1991) and has already begun writing No. 16, entitled **'The Legacy of Vashna'**. Joe and John Grant have also now completed the sixth Legends novel which is called—**'The Sacrifice of Ruanon'**.

This year Joe is also working on two exciting new Lone Wolf projects. The first is a 64-page graphic novel entitled: **'Lone Wolf—Last of the Kai'**. It will be scripted by Joe and illustrated by Cyril Julien, whose work may be familiar to readers of *GamesMaster International* magazine. Publication has been scheduled for March 1992 but we intend to preview artwork in club newsletters before then.



The second new project is a Lone Wolf audiobook: a three-hour audiocassette adaptation of the first Legends novel 'Eclipse of the Kai'. Work begins on this project in June with publication also set for March 1992. The tapes will feature the voice of Edward de Souza, who is the narrator of the Lone Wolf PhoneQuest adventures, and will be further enhanced with sound effects and music especially composed and performed by Joe.



Joe Dever will be Guest of Honour once again at this year's British Play-by-Mail Convention (*see the advertisement in this issue for full details*). Lone Wolf Club members will be especially welcome at the Lone Wolf / Red Fox trade stand. If you'd like to meet Joe and discuss his work, apply for your tickets now. Joe will also be guesting at the International Fantasy Gaming Society's Convention in Denver, Colorado USA (May 24–26th, 1991). Other well-known fantasy authors attending will include Larry Niven, Steven Barnes, and Simon Hawke. For further details, write to:

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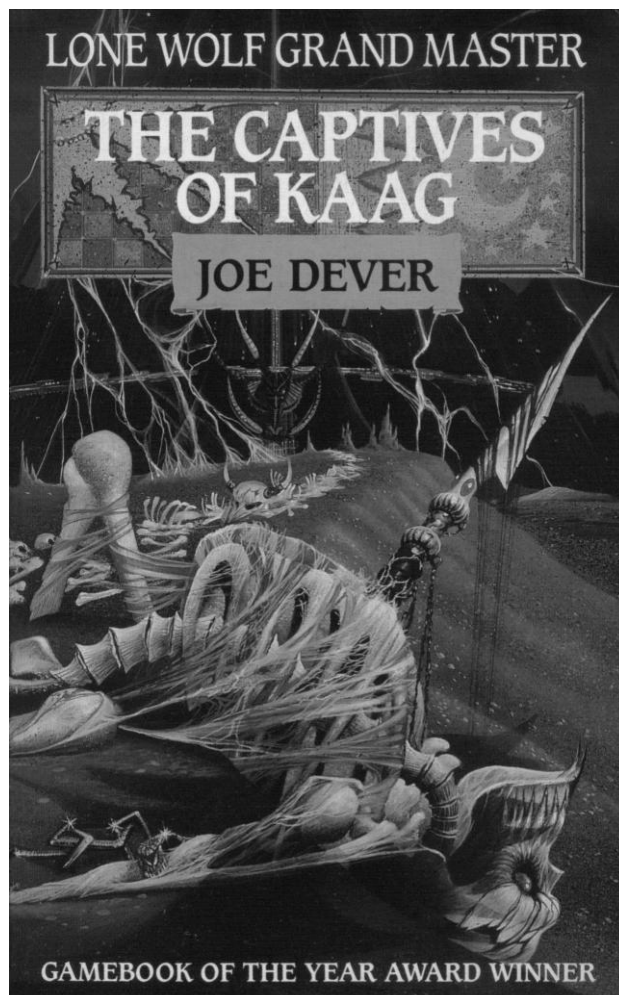
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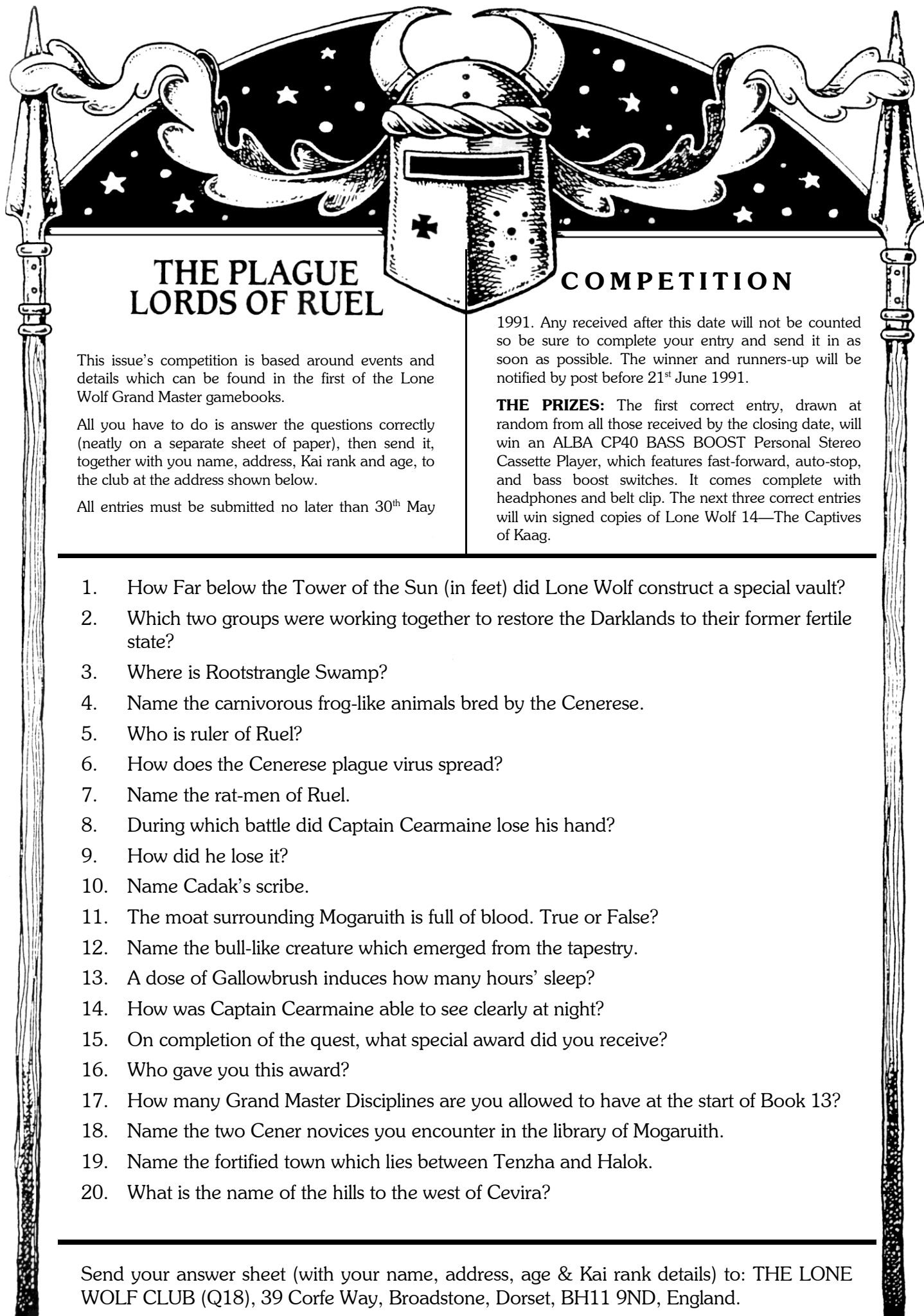
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THE PLAGUE LORDS OF RUEL

This issue's competition is based around events and details which can be found in the first of the Lone Wolf Grand Master gamebooks.

All you have to do is answer the questions correctly (neatly on a separate sheet of paper), then send it, together with your name, address, Kai rank and age, to the club at the address shown below.

All entries must be submitted no later than 30th May

COMPETITION

1991. Any received after this date will not be counted so be sure to complete your entry and send it in as soon as possible. The winner and runners-up will be notified by post before 21st June 1991.

THE PRIZES: The first correct entry, drawn at random from all those received by the closing date, will win an ALBA CP40 BASS BOOST Personal Stereo Cassette Player, which features fast-forward, auto-stop, and bass boost switches. It comes complete with headphones and belt clip. The next three correct entries will win signed copies of Lone Wolf 14—The Captives of Kaag.

1. How Far below the Tower of the Sun (in feet) did Lone Wolf construct a special vault?
2. Which two groups were working together to restore the Darklands to their former fertile state?
3. Where is Rootstrangle Swamp?
4. Name the carnivorous frog-like animals bred by the Cenerese.
5. Who is ruler of Ruel?
6. How does the Cenerese plague virus spread?
7. Name the rat-men of Ruel.
8. During which battle did Captain Cearmaine lose his hand?
9. How did he lose it?
10. Name Cadak's scribe.
11. The moat surrounding Mogaruith is full of blood. True or False?
12. Name the bull-like creature which emerged from the tapestry.
13. A dose of Gallowbrush induces how many hours' sleep?
14. How was Captain Cearmaine able to see clearly at night?
15. On completion of the quest, what special award did you receive?
16. Who gave you this award?
17. How many Grand Master Disciplines are you allowed to have at the start of Book 13?
18. Name the two Cener novices you encounter in the library of Mogaruith.
19. Name the fortified town which lies between Tenzha and Halok.
20. What is the name of the hills to the west of Cevira?

Send your answer sheet (with your name, address, age & Kai rank details) to: THE LONE WOLF CLUB (Q18), 39 Corfe Way, Broadstone, Dorset, BH11 9ND, England.

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21 August 2009

0. Preamble

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